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ABSTRACT

A national indifference to children is indicated by the system of foster child care and by the treatment of mental retardates. Another manifestation is the attack on Head Start. Criticism based on the program's failure to raise standardized intelligence or aptitude scores is misplaced. Head Start is a broad developmental program having many components. Approximately 40 percent of children coming to Head Start centers have an identifiable physical defect. Over 75 percent have had their defects treated. The author asserts he is proud to have been one of the architects of Head Start, for which was enunciated the principle of parent participation. Through such participation, one sees parents getting a new sense of dignity and a new sense of being able to control their own destiny and that of their children. In 58 communities where Head Start was available, it changed their health and education delivery system. Head Start is directed toward improving the social competence of the child, rather than toward massive IQ changes. The children's centers of the seventies should provide both a variety of services for children on a full-day rather than half-day basis, and the means for mixing children of different socio-economic groups. [Due to the quality of the original, this document will not be clearly legible.] (Author/JM)

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CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN THE 70'S: A FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE *

By

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I am delighted to be with you and to have this opportunity to share with you some of my hopes and concerns regarding public policy towards children.

I must confess that I am far from content or sanguine about our nation's treatment of children. We are very fond of saying in this country that children are our most valuable natural resource. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that we treat this natural resource as badly as we have treated many of our other natural resources. In fact, I think that we tend to romanticize how much we do for children, in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary. There is a myth abroad in this land that we are a child-oriented society, that nothing is too good for our children; however, we deny that with the realities that we see all about us. I don't think this country is going to make very much progress in its treatment of children until it sees with clarity, with open eyes, what the shortcomings of our country and society are in the treatment of our young.

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Let us consider the example of our treatment of foster children. The statement has been made that concerns do not change, they just grow older. We have the same problem with foster children that we have always had. In fact, I was recently looking at the United Nations Charter on Children of 1959 in which it said that every child had a right to a home. I saw those same words in a Bill of Rights for Children that was produced by the White House Conference on Children of 1930. And yet, we still perpetuate a system in this country in which it is permitted for a child to be moved from home to home to home, when we all know that continuity, affection, solidity, are what make for normal development. We are still satisfied with a system of foster care for children that permits a child to live one place for a few years and then be moved on to the next place for a few years. If one examines only the cost of this kind of care, the figure comes to 50 or 60 thousand dollars by the time the child reaches maturity. Yet our society is slow in spending the very few thousand dollars that would be involved in subsidized adoption.

But the problem goes beyond money. It goes to the very value system that we have in respect to children and their rights. Over and over, we see this nation so concerned with the rights of adults and biological parents that the rights of children do, indeed, come last. For instance, we have a situation in this country today where there are more families who would like to adopt children than there are children to be adopted. Yet, we still have foster children. That

makes no sense. Why don't we have these children adopted? Well, it has been pointed out to me that the law in New York State says that you cannot adopt a child providing that the biological parent maintains some interest in the child. How great an interest? The rule in New York is that, if a parent will send that child one postcard a year, that child cannot be adopted! We saw the clash between the rights of biological parents and children in a very dramatic way, again in New York State. A three-year old adopted child was taken from the arms of the only real mother, in my estimation, that child had ever had and handed back to the biological mother who, three years later, had changed her mind.

For any of you who must still be disabused about this nation's treatment of its children, I suggest you visit a few of the children's institutions in this country. This nation is the only one I know of that permits the legalized abuse and dehumanization of children in institutions. I hope many of you saw the television program which appeared some months ago, "This Child Labelled X." Programs like that can make a difference, and I recommend it to you. I also recommend a book to you, essentially a book of pictures, entitled Christmas in Purgatory, by an old colleague and friend, Professor Burton Blatt, who is now at the University of Syracuse. On page after page you see children, young people, huddled in corners, filthy and neglected. What was the sin of these children? What did they do to deserve this kind of treatment by our society? In most cases, the only sin they perpetrated was that they happened to be mentally retarded.

Since I am a bureaucrat these days, you might interpret what I am saying as some kind of attack on the Administration of which I am a part. That is not what I am doing here this evening. I am not attacking this particular Administration, or for that matter any administration that preceded it. What I am saying is, rather, an indictment of our nation.

Another manifestation of this national indifference to children is the attack on Head Start. I discovered upon coming to Washington that probably the most innovative program that our nation has ever mounted in behalf of needy children was being dismissed as a "failure." Head Start was yesterday's "thing;" now people could only say negative things about it, disparage it, say "well, the Westinghouse Report shows it's not very good, and it's not accomplishing very much, and what's the next thing we ought to be doing?" This, ladies and gentlemen, is utter nonsense. The Jensen Report, Eysenck's book, the recent paper by Herrenstein, all lead to criticism of the compensatory education programs of this nation on the basis of the fact that some portion of intelligence is certainly heretible. That criticism is simply misplaced. I would say to you that if anyone looks at the evidence about the Head Start program, one would have no difficulty in asserting its success. What criteria should be used in evaluating such a program? First of all, one should look at the goals of the program itself. Head Start is a broad developmental program having many components and is certainly not directed exclusively at IQ raising. If one looks at what has been achieved with some of these components, Head Start is quite impressive.

Let's take health: figures indicate that of the children who show up at our Head Start centers, something on the order of 40 percent have an identifiable physical defect. If you now multiply that number by the some 400,000 children who have been in Head Start each of its five years you are talking about hundreds of thousands of children. Of those children, over 75 percent have had their physical defects treated.

Or consider parent involvement--I had the honor of being the respondent to Senator Harris yesterday when he pointed out that our institutions are not responsive enough to people and people must play an important role in shaping our institutions. I am proud to be one of the architects of Head Start, for which we enunciated the principle of parent participation, and parent participation remains a keystone of the Head Start program. Through such parent participation, one sees parents who get a new sense of dignity, a new sense of worth, a new sense of being able to control their own destiny and that of their children. As a result we have children in homes that are much more conducive to the child's growth and development.

Let's look at the Kirschner Report on what happens when you have a Head Start program in a community. That report indicated that in 58 communities where Head Start was available, not only did it help the children in the Head Start program, but it changed the political and social ecology of the community. Something on the order of 1,500 changes have been made in the health and education delivery systems in those 58 communities.

How about parents' assessment of Head Start? They think it's great. They see what it is doing for their children; is this no longer a criterion for the worth of a program? Furthermore, although we have wrestled with the evaluation problem for a good number of years, one thing is very clear in the evaluations of Head Start; if you look at Head Start children versus an appropriate control group at the point of time at which they leave Head Start those children are superior to the control children on any dimension--health, cognition, social development--anything you want to measure. What happens, of course, is that these gains seem to be lost as children proceed through the school system. There are many interpretations for this loss but one hypothesis I would put to you is that these kinds of findings are much more an indictment of the American school system than they are of Head Start.

Why the negative view of Head Start? Well, I think we made some mistakes--I think the nation frequently does and I think we experts often do. First of all, we were satisfied with too narrow an evaluation. We ourselves permitted Head Start to be painted into the IQ corner in which it was going to be assessed on the basis of whether we produce instant genuis or not. But that was fallacious. That was never the goal of Head Start. Head Start had never been directed toward massive IQ changes. What it has been directed towards is improving the social competence of the child. Many of you have certainly heard me go on about this at some length and those of you

who have read my papers certainly know it is my conviction that the greatest good we can do in compensatory education--a fact totally overlooked by Jensen and by Herrenstein and by others--is to bring about changes in the motivational system of the child. The problems of many of our poor children are not problems of stupidity but rather the problem of not using the intellect that they have. If we could just change their attitudes about themselves, create a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their ability to succeed, I think that you immediately see the kinds of gains that can occur through compensatory education programs.

However, in addition to this notion that what Head Start was all about was to produce a cadre of professors for Yale and Harvard, there was another mistaken view of Head Start that gained ascendency. Perhaps I should not use the word mistake because it is pejorative; rather, an argument concerning the relative importance of environment and heredity in intellectual development has been waging in the intellectual community for a good number of years, but in our thinking about Head Start one particular point of view prevailed. And that particular point of view, which I have referred to in the past as the environmental mystique, is characterized by the view that IQ is easy to change. Many believed it would be easy to hurry children along through the developmental sequence if we could just find the right gadget, the right mobile, the right something-or-other. Well, I do think that was a mistake. And those who have been writing for a good number of years about how easy it is to change the IQ and who report to us changes in IQs of 60 and 80

points, I think do a great disservice to social action programs because they are listened to by decision-makers. Decision-makers listened to the "environmental mystiquers" at the inception of Head Start, and I saw this view manifested in the thinking of people who were indeed very powerful and really knew what power was all about. I remember standing in the Rose Garden next to President Johnson after the first summer of Head Start. We had gotten this program off the ground rather hurriedly, very sloppily. We had given children something-or-other of varying quality for six or eight weeks and everyone liked it. It was the Sesame Street of 1965 and the President was there to announce that we would have a full year program. He said in effect, "We had six hundred thousand children in Head Start this summer and as a result we will have sixhundred thousand tax paying citizens whereas otherwise we would have had six hundred thousand more individuals on welfare." Well, what does this reflect? Not President Johnson's stupidity, because he is a very wise man. What it reflects is the kind of thinking that experts had instilled in decision-makers--that it is easy to develop the intellect--easy to develop social competence in children. And it reflects something else: it reflects a shortcoming that I think I have found in the national character, namely, a desire for simple solutions to complex problems. So we flit, and the nation flits,from "magic period" to "magic period". If you cannot do it with eight weeks, try a year. You didn't do it with a year, Head Start? Well, you got there too late. Now there is

a new magic period, the first year of life, and we are in the "mobile" stage of child development. Ladies and gentlemen, if we continue telling decision-makers this we are probably the greatest enemies that our children have. I am convinced that we know better than that about child development, and the message we ought to be giving is "look, you are not going to get off on the cheap. The developing child is not that plastic a thing. There are no magic periods. Yes, the first year of life is critical. So is the second." I have told the President of the United States that I admire his position on the first five years of life. That is finally a step in the right direction. But I have also informed him that if you do everything you can in the first five years of life and forget the next five, you're still not going to get the job done. You have to respect the continuity of human development. You have to make sure that that child has the environmental input at every stage to optimize his total development, and only by this kind of commitment will we ever be able to optimize the development of children.

I want to say one final thing about Head Start, and something that is troubling me. Dr. Julius Richmond pointed this out most eloquently and I would simply like to underline his remarks. We evaluators spend much time trying to demonstrate that if you do something for a child when he is four and maybe when he is seven you can show that that child has got four more achievement points on a Metropolitan Reading Test which is correlated about .20 with

something later in life. It is something later that we are shooting for. It is this kind of insidious thinking that I am here to attack; when we talk about the quality of the lives of citizens in this country, we seem to always be talking about the quality of the lives of adults, so that when we mount a program for children we always want to assess its future results. But if you go into a ghetto apartment in Harlem, or for that matter a shack in Mississippi, and see an over-burdened mother with no physical resources, under great stress; a child having little to do, not getting the proper nutrition, not getting health care, not getting the kind of experience that is in any way developmental; and then if you see the same child in a Head Start Center, opening up, smiling, sitting down to a balanced lunch, getting medical care--do you need much of an evaluation to tell you that programs such as this are worthwhile? If you let one of the variables in your cost-benefit analysis be the happiness and the improvement in the quality of the lives of those children during their enrollment in your program, the program is indeed worth the cost.

Well, I do not think there has been an effort of mine that I take greater pride in than my role as a planner for Head Start. I am proud of that program and I have gone on record again today to tell you that I believe it is the most important social action effort ever mounted on behalf of needy children in this country. But after saying that, I will say to you that our country would be mistaken to stand pat. We cannot afford to stand pat on a program that only delivers these services to 10 to 15 percent of the nation's children who need them.

We have to move on. Furthermore, the answer to the needs of many children is not just half-day programs. We have to move on into the day care area as well. I see us moving on from Head Start to types of centers that would provide a variety of services for children, with one very important new service being day care.

I also see the children's centers of the 70's quite different from the Head Start centers of the 60's with respect to one very important phenomenon--namely, the mixing of children of different socio-economic groups. Looking back upon it now, I think that it was a mistake to set up a program just for poor children; to segregate these economically disadvantaged children at an early time in life. Again, we did not have enough money, so we chose to give the money to the most needy. Well, that really is not the solution. I think we know better now, and it is really interesting to me how the times have changed. I remember a year ago when I first started talking about the need for mixing socio-economic groups in children's centers, the New York Times took issue with me in an editorial in which they suggested very gently that I was probably some kind of a reverse Robin Hood--that what I had in mind was to take from the poor and give to the rich. That is not what I have in mind at all.

What I have in mind is centers most conducive to the growth of children, and there are at least three reasons why the children's centers of the future must be heterogeneous in terms of socio-economic classes. The first reason was pointed out by a far better politician than me and is simply a pragmatic political reason--that as long as you

have pro[illegible] that are just directed at poor children, those programs are politically vulnerable. Senator Bayh, who is certainly no enemy of the poor, pointed out that you have got to have massive support to keep spending the literally billions of dollars that these programs are going to cost and you will never get that support until the programs are providing services to more than just the poor.

The second reason is a little bit closer to my heart as a developmentalist: we know that children grow more optimally to the degree that they have a wide array of models after whom to model their behavior. I think that economically disadvantaged children can model after certain achievement traits, certain orientations, of the middle class child and I think it would be equally valuable for the middle class child to model after certain virtues of the child from poverty--early independence, persistence; less fearfulness; and now there is evidence of even greater creativity--they are simply not as up tight as the middle class five year old, it appears.

The third reason is simply social-psychological. I am troubled by the quality of life in this country in many respects. I am troubled by the polarization; I am troubled by what we have witnessed over the last few years--whites against blacks; the old against the young; the academics against the hard-hats. The nation cannot long endure unless these groups find commonality. The social fabric can only stand so much pulling and hauling. If we want to produce

the types of citizens, the types of adults who can indeed understand and respect one another, certainly the way to accomplish this is not to begin tracking children along socio-economic class lines at the age of 6 months. My social psychological training tells me that if you do so segregate groups, you will probably develop within these groups some in-group solidarity, and there is some value in that. But it is also accompanied by just too much out-group hostility. So I say that, given the values of our nation and what we would like our country to be, that we must move to do all we can to bring children, at least, together. What I have in mind, then, are centers that have heterogeneous groups of children; that have a whole array of services, everthing from day care to drop off service to overnight service to caring for a child for a few days while a family is in a period of stress. Obviously, we must protect what we have won for the poor to date in these centers, and the way to do this is pretty obvious. People who cannot afford these services will receive them as a right. People who can afford some of these services and want to avail themselves of them will pay a fee, with the fees being scaled to income.

Now there is going to be another problem,and I think that it is going to be the battle of the 70's; you are going to have to take sides on it and some of you will wind up on one side and some of you on another. But let me raise the problem: It would be very easy for me to sit in my office at Yale and devise the very best possible program for children that I could devise. I know what it would look like.

But the cost is simply fantastic. We will have to find new ways of caring for children in this nation. The most important factor in the cost of care of a child in a Head Start center or the type of children's center that I envisage is the amount of money that we pay the head teacher. The nation has tended to move in two directions on this cost issue. One direction you are all familiar with; I would refer to it as pristine professional purity--that is, if you want to have a very good center to help children, you should go to Bank Street and get one of their MA's. Well, there is little question in my mind that that is true and I have a lot of friends who are MA's from Bank Street. But saying that Bank Street teachers will meet the child care needs of this nation is akin to saying that psychoanalysts will meet the needs posed by the mental health problems of this country. There are simply not enough of them. And there is another factor; when you start a children's center with an enrollment of thirty children, it is simply not economically viable to have such a person run it; it simply costs too much. So both from the view point of availability and from the view point of fiscal reality, we cannot staff our children's centers with the most highly trained professionals in child development.

There is another direction that the nation started to move in a few years ago, but it cannot be the solution. I am referring to the naive, romantic view that if you are just poor yourself, or have a good heart, or some combination of the two, you are ideally suited to train young children. This is not true. There is knowledge one should have about children. There are optimal

ways to interact with children. There are many things that one should know. What we must do in this nation is develop an entirely new cadre of child care workers. This would be a group of certified people who have achieved their status through different pathways. The skills that we would want to require for certification would be circumscribed skills. I respect all of the things that go into a BA; I have spent much of my life training students for the BA. But really, much of what is taught in the university is not essential to caring for a child properly. What we need to do is develop more circumscribed training which will receive formal recognition. Is this a revolutionary concept? No. Other nations have done it. We are again behind. I would refer you to the children's nurse in Denmark; the up-bringer in Russia; the children's house worker in Israel--these are the kinds of models I have in mind, and OCD will be moving over the course of the next year toward fleshing out this particular proposal.

I want to close by presenting to you one further trend I see for the 70's. I am beginning to be a little troubled by the unidirectional stance that the nation is taking with respect to child care. We do a lot of talk about supplementing family life; we put a child into a day care center for 8, 10 or 12 hours a day so that the parents can earn the resources with which to provide an adequate home for the child; then we supplement family life a little bit more with an hour of good children's TV. Before long, at this rate, we will not be supplementing family life; we will be supplanting it. I think that there is beginning to be a trend

in this nation of parents handing children over to "experts," however they are trained, in the belief that they know what to do better than parents themselves. This budding trend will blossom in the 70's as a full-blown problem. Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, per usual, is a little bit ahead of the thinkers in the field and is performing for us a great service, namely, analyzing what we now know about child development in centers. He comes out with the not terribly astounding, but nonetheless refreshing, conclusion that perhaps the best place to raise children is in the home. Be that as it may, there are new social forms and society must provide choices. We are not going to stop the movement of women into the work force and we must have good day care for the children of these women. But at the same time, we must not indicate to every parent, every mother, every father, every family, that optimal child development rests in handing the child over to some center.

What I would recommend to this nation is that as we develop the kinds of centers I have been talking about we develop alternate forms in which we do nothing but supplement family life by helping parents in the parenting function. I think we could do this in several ways. One way, which we should have begun a long time ago, is the training of young people in parenting. Parenting is tough. It is tough not just for the poor; it is tough for the rich. We all practice on our first child. We learn by some kind of trial and error and it is becoming more and more difficult to care for our own children because we no longer have the extended family, a grandma or Aunt Susie to come help us. What we should do in this country is insist

that as part of high school life, every adolescent receives courses in parenting. These courses would involve adolescents in working with younger children--tutoring them, working in day care centers--to bring didactic materials on child development to life through particular young children. I say that if our high schools can teach driver education and ancient history, we can certainly use that kind of learning center to help young people in assuming the most important role our society gives to an adult; namely, that of a parent. We should do other things too, and we will.

We should have not only center programs; we should begin and we will begin in the Office of Child Development in the next few months a program which I will label Homestart. In this program, we will have individuals go into homes upon the request of parents, not to give them great expertise but to ask a simple question: What kind of help do you want with your child? Then we will do our best to provide that kind of help. I have been intrigued by Homestart-like programs such as those of Ira Gordon, Susan Gray, and there are a number of them now. Let us begin utilizing this information to help mothers be mothers, because as Urie Bronfenbrenner puts it so well, it still appears that a mother will do for nothing what you cannot pay other people to do for a lot of money. In addition to courses in parenting and programs such as Homestart, I think we ought to have a "Sesame Street" for parents. Such programs are being developed now and they will also contribute much to our efforts to help parents in the parenting function.

This has been a very brief view of where we have been the last few years, where I think we might be going over the next ten years, and what I believe the major problems to be. I have been a little severe, although I think deservedly so in light of the track record of this nation. I would like to leave you on a somewhat more positive note, and that is that I think the nation is moving forward in respect to children. Workers have increasingly come out of the laboratories and have tried to see how we can utilize what we know in behalf of children, and I think that this will have great payoff to children.

I think that the very establishment, for the first time in this nation, of an Office of Child Development is a very healthy step. I believe there is a real concern for children within the Administration and among leaders of both parties on the Hill. We now have knowledge, we now have expertise, we now have concern. There may be some obstacles ahead, but if we all keep up the momentum that I think we now have, I predict that we will indeed be able to say as we introduce the 80's that our nation has done the kind of job for children during the 70's that children have a right to expect of us.

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